

REDEFINING THE STEREOTYPICAL PLAYGROUND:  
A Park Design for New Bremen, Ohio

An Honors Thesis (LA 404)

by

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## 1.1 Review Of Literature

[A] Natural Play v. Equipment-Based Design

[B] Understanding Child's Play

[C] Economic Impact of Parks

## 1.2 Survey Summary

## [A] NATURAL PLAY V. EQUIPMENT-BASED DESIGN

Hendricks boldly states that “children’s playgrounds are filled with play equipment that adults want to give children, not with the things that children want to play with” [7]. She, as well as Baker, Bishop, Bundy, and Fjørtoft, has published various works that attempt to understand not only what play environments are most beneficial to children, but also what kids want to play with. As each author explores different playground types and/or contemporary issues, we, as designers, are better able to create innovative design solutions that will challenge society’s established idea of a playground. We can evaluate the issues and benefits associated with both equipment-based design and natural play spaces in order to develop a new age definition of the word.

### NATURAL PLAY

Some consider natural playgrounds as that modern way to address how children play. They are increasingly gaining popularity, specifically in northern European countries like Germany and Sweden [Hendricks 203]. Generations prior, children had wild lands to explore and natural environments in which to learn. Today, such areas are less prevalent and their value towards a child’s development is not cherished [Fjørtoft 22]. Only recently have the benefits of natural playscapes been re-discovered. A study done in Norway compared children whom played on a traditional playground with ones who were given a natural playscape in which to roam. The results found that kids whom played in the natural setting showed a greater increase in balance, coordination, creativity, and overall fitness [Fjørtoft]. Even though manufactured equipment is designed to promote these same qualities and skills, children seemed less likely to explore its potential.

Although such comparisons prove the physical and cognitive benefits of natural playgrounds, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly why they are more successful. Perhaps it is the ever changing attributes of the natural

playground that attracts kids to a space. Topography and vegetation alone allow for countless different design configurations that challenge the child (Fjørtoft 22). These elements are not seen in the traditional, flat, asphalt-covered playground. Or maybe the natural playground's success can be attributed to the introduction of loose parts. Loose elements allow a specific play space to constantly evolve as children construct imaginative worlds. Stones are used to build towers, twigs and leaves are gathered for pretend play, and sand is dug and moved (Hendricks 93). The environment is constantly changing. Hendricks writes that water "moves, it changes the colour of the sand, it can be manipulated, it drips,...it makes noise, [and] it can be dammed up" (92). And I assure you that nothing which appeals so directly to a child's senses can be found in a catalog.

## EQUIPMENT-BASED PLAY

Of the constructed play world, however, there was once "a [brief] time in America, [when] a playground...was as coveted as an edgy new museum or concert hall" (Bishop 154). Evidence of this is exemplified in the work of past playground leader Richard Dattner's designs. His five different play spaces, located in Central Park and done in the 1960s, each engaged the user in a new way and were soundly based on psychologists' understanding of play (Bishop 158). Now however, the built playground is described differently. They have become mass-produced gatherings of brightly colored play elements and are quite adequately labeled as the McDonald's of the landscape (Baker 42). Travel to any corner of the globe and one can see and experience the same. It's as if only a handful of rubber stamps are available when drawing up the plans (Hendricks 18).

We are quick to shoot down this monotonous playground scene, but the truth is that it does allow children to the opportunity to play. Countless studies demonstrate that children like to both swing and slide, two basic elements found on every "monotonous" playground (Hendricks 71). The problem is not that these toys fail to allow for such activities, but that they



continue to do so in the same manner. As the play space of today continues to take shape, it is important that designers continue to support the basic desires of the kids who will use them (Hendricks 71).

Perhaps the solution is not taking out this equipment altogether but rather, to edit its use so that manufactured elements better fit in to the overall design of the play space. Memorial Playground, located in Wilsonville, Oregon and completed in 2006, does a brilliant job at actualizing this idea. It merged the site's existing natural features with purchased play equipment to create a series of unique, open-ended play spaces that blur the line between spaces for spectators and spaces for play (Baker 42,46).

## THE ISSUE OF RISK

But despite such innovation, the biggest issue in the equipment-based world of playground design still exists: how much risk should be allowed? Over the past few decades, fear of lawsuits seems to have detracted designers from putting any creativity into the very places where imagination should be running rampant. The seesaw and merry-go-round were the first elements to be censored in the United States, and the swing set is now increasingly being threatened (Baker 44). Society wants children to grow and learn about the world through play, yet the spaces for play restrict them from doing so. The I Ching states that “those with little experience have little **“those with little experience have little wisdom”** wisdom” (Hendricks 63). Risk is not only part of the thrill of playing, but an essential part of acquiring knowledge.

And how much injury are we really protecting our children from? When comparing the number of injuries to those acquired from indoor items like beds and stairs, playground bumps and bruises rank relatively low (Hendricks 62). Additionally, a study done in 2009 found that observers often perceive a greater risk than what truly exists. After giving children loose elements with which to push, pull, lift, and stack, studies showed that parents' and teachers' stress levels rose even though no child was injured (Bundy 43). So

why are playground policies tightening? Campaigning to safeguard relaxed playground guidelines may be the first step in generating the play space of tomorrow. Lady Allen, Landscape Architect and child advocate once stated “better a broken arm than a bruised spirit” (Bishop 154). I could not agree with this more.

While I may agree that more risk should be allowed in the play environment, designers should see this issue as a challenge and face it head on. Part of the magic of design is implementing creative solutions that fit within such framework, and New Bremen’s proposed play space is no exception. The park combines elements from both natural and equipment-based play to take advantage of the benefits offered of each. Rugged and organic elements offer children a place to freely explore their natural world as they meld with those traditional components that encourage active play. By doing so, New Bremen’s new park overcomes the current issues with playgrounds today and exemplifies the immense benefits a well-designed play space is capable of producing.

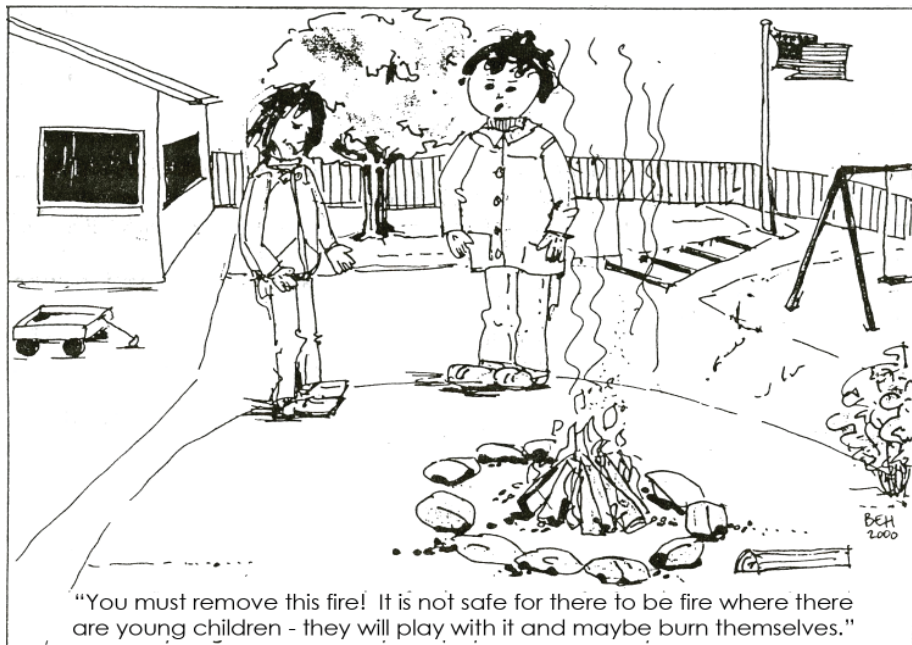


Figure 1.1: Risk Illustration

## [B] UNDERSTANDING CHILD'S PLAY

Too often playgrounds are designed by individuals who know something about spatial layout, but nothing about children or play [Hendricks 7]. Though the resulting space will most likely suffice, it will lack that personable quality which nonverbally communicates to the user that this space was designed for them. In order to design for play, it is essential that one understands play. Authors Wilkinson, Frost, Hall, Henig, and Hendricks have all addressed the subject and published works that discuss play's history, role, and benefits within our society.

Play's importance to western culture dates back to the eighteenth century when it was recognized by playwright and scholar Friedrich Schiller in his work entitled *Aesthetic Letters* [Hall 40]. In them, Schiller wrote that man "is only completely a man when he plays" and "man is never so serious as when he plays" [Hall 40]. Though play as a topic for research has since gone on to be studied by individuals like Karl Groos and Sigmund Freud, we have yet to fully understand its function. Hendricks suggests that "play is such an intrinsic part of being human that it is difficult for us to get the scientific distance to study it" [7]. And though it is challenging to wrap our heads around its role in humanity, no one seems to debate its value. It is even recognized at the governmental level as cities allocate funds to fulfill their duty of creating special and challenging outdoor play environments for children [Hendricks 9]. So, yes, society holds play to some high importance, but why?

### PLAY-AS-PREPARATION

One popular theory is the play-as-preparation concept. This model was influenced by the work of Darwin and suggests that an individual plays to practice skills that they will need later in life [Frost 4]. By observing both animal and human subjects, one can see the potential for this theory to be valid. Young wolves bite and wrestle, for example, when they are engaged in

play. Both of these actions are talents that the adult animal will need later in life as they hunt for prey with their pack (Henig 42). In humans, one can furthermore visualize how a child hammering colored wood blocks relates to common adult roles. Though this theory of playing to prepare for “reality” resonates with many, the issue is that there is minimal scientific evidence to support its claims. A Scottish study displayed how two different groups of kittens showed no difference in skills as adults despite the fact that one group was allowed objects to interact with when they were young (Henig 42).

Perhaps the reason that children play is instead related to the fact that they are able to test out actions and emotions too dangerous to experience in everyday life. As long as every child understands that it is just play, kids often use role playing as a way to learn the rejection of a friend, for example, or of anger or love (Hendricks 13). A ferocious dragon may attack their fort and they are thus called upon to be brave. Whatever the situation, role playing’s prevalence in a child’s life suggests that it must serve some benefit. On average, pretend play occupies approximately twenty percent of a four-year-  
**“pretend play occupies 20% of a 4-year-old child’s day”**  
old child’s day (Henig 60). Play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith specifically talks of role playing’s benefits by stating that “children learn all those necessary arts of trickery, deception, harassment, divination and foul play that their teacher won’t teach them but are most important in successful human relationships in marriage, business and war” (Henig 75).

## PLAY’S BENEFITS

Play’s benefits themselves may provide us with an answer as to why children engage in play. A superior play environment nurtures development in terms of areas like a child’s physical fitness, intelligence, creativity, self-confidence, cooperation, responsibility, sense of humor, and individuality (Wilkinson 23). It can be summed up by stating that “through play children develop mastery of their physical and social environment” (Frost 21). Yet while these aspects do prove that playing is advantageous to the child, they too cannot be

accredited with the reason as to why play is a part of our lives. Things like cognitive flexibility, creative problem-solving, and motor development could all be mastered through given instruction (Henig 75).

Stating that the reason young people engage in play is unknown is not to discredit its importance in our ever evolving world. Listen to a child's laughter or witness their joy and one will know that play is worthwhile. No scientific research is needed to convey that fact. Children gain pleasure through play and derive happiness from their ability to master skills (Frost 21). With recess time slowly diminishing we recognize that today, more than ever, it is important that we acknowledge play's part in every person's development. And as we continue to research the psychology of play we must continue to develop creative spaces that promote such natural laughter and wholesome joy.



Figure 1.2: Pretend Play

To design for children means to design flexible spaces that are able to cater to a child's immense world of pretend. Whether play is used to prepare for adulthood, to learn of complicated emotion, to physically and cognitively develop, or to fulfill some other unknown necessity, the truth is that play is highly prevalent in a child's everyday life. As an informed designer, one should allow for spaces where children can play house and take on the roles of adults, as well as act out huge battles and experience defeat. All popular theories were adequately supported in creating New Bremen's proposed playspace because although the theory of play and its significance is debatable, its presence is undoubtedly cherished. After all, "look at life without play, and it's not much of a life" (Henig 75).

## [C] THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PARKS

Rogers, Harnik and Welle have all written pieces that weigh the economic value of a public park. From their articles, as well as studied case studies, one finds that the flow of money and its correlation to public green space can be examined on a variety of levels. Not only do successful parks provide users with direct savings and cities with an increased common wealth, but nearby businesses and properties also benefit.

### PROPERTY VALUE & CITY WEALTH

The simplest benefit to quantify is the increased property value and positive business jump for those properties surrounding the park. Welle and Harnik state that properties within 500 feet of any park one acre in size or greater will experience a significant increase in hedonic value [1]. And as property value increases, a city's collective wealth does as well. A study done in Washington, D.C. found that annually, approximately seven million dollars of the total collected property tax could be attributed to parks [Harnik 2]. As for the increased business for local entrepreneurs, it can be said that a well-designed park not only attracts nearby residents, but also those individuals who reside beyond its immediate vicinity. There is a direct relationship between open space and tourism. In 1995, the U.S. Forest Service properties attracted nearly twenty-eight million visitors, whom, in turn, produced \$401 million in revenue for surrounding local businesses [Rogers 27]. A study was also done in San Diego in 2006. This survey found that 22% of day visitors were visiting the city because of a park and on average, those visitors spent \$48 per day [Harnik 4]. Such information proves that parks of any kind play a vital role in a community's economy. Therefore, a city's investment in public park space is economically smart.

### IMPACT OF PARK QUALITY

The quality of the developed park, however, does play a role in its success. Public spaces that include recreational opportunities, natural elements, are



aesthetically attractive, and are well maintained are a few characteristics directly associated with positive economic value [Harnik 1]. Therefore, everything begins with design (and ends with upkeep). The elements and creativity put into a space have an effect on its economic value. While research that quantifies a park's quality and evaluates its exact relationship to economic value is difficult to correlate and still continues, this statement is universally held to be true. Meridian Hill Park in Washington, D.C., for example, does add value to the ample amounts of dwelling units that surround this green space [Harnik 1]. It is difficult, however, to quantify how these numbers would change if the park quality differed because of the multiple other factors that could also be said to come into play.

## IMMEASURABLE BENEFITS

But there are also those economic benefits that are not directly measurable. Public parks offer people a free place to engage in play, picnicking, sports, **“Public parks offer people a free place to engage in play”** etc. Engaging in each of these activities has a price tag in the private sector. Harnik points out other ways that park users directly save money. He writes of “the medical savings realized by city residents because of park exercise” and the service hours volunteers put in to keeping parks beautiful [8-9]. These sometimes overlooked savings can be just as valuable as the before-mentioned earnings.

The notion of parks having economic value is not, however, a new concept. “As early as the 1850s, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted justified the purchase of land for New York’s Central Park by noting that the rising value of adjacent property would produce enough in taxes to pay for the park”[Rogers 21]. But because of Olmsted’s great success, individuals may assume that any allocated public green space will have the same result. I, however, believe that economic success also has a lot to do with innovation and the amount of draw factor your design includes. David Rockwell, a contemporary leader in playground design, exemplified this point with his creation of New York City’s new Imagination Playground (Figure 1.3). The

## ABSTRACT

This project examined the current formula for playground design and redefined how we view spaces for play. It exemplified that a playground can become more than simply the overused scene of manufactured elements grouped together atop a bed of mulch. Though playground design has evolved over the years from being a place for only the elite to a common element of public parks, little has changed since the early twentieth century. By recognizing that there are still great opportunities to take hold of in terms of designing for play, we can create more suitable spaces for the children of today. Significantly changing the way we approach playground design allows for better spaces that enhance creativity and spark imagination in children of all ages.

The project exemplified this concept through the design of a park in New Bremen, Ohio. It took a previously underutilized space, located in the heart of the village, and transformed it into an imaginative playspace for all to enjoy. As children slide, swing, run, climb, explore, and laugh amidst the redesigned green space, businesses and nearby properties relish in the economic benefits it brings to the community. The designer's knowledge of the psychology of play and its importance in children's lives was evident as play elements and spaces directly cater to its young users. Furthermore, as New Bremen's dynamic history and rich culture was incorporated into the design, visitors undoubtedly recognize that this unique playspace was designed solely for them. New Bremen's new playspace serves as the frontrunner for the new wave of innovative playground design. Not only does it provide others with an example of the limitless possibilities we have yet to discover in terms of designing for play, but it also provides the New Bremen community with a valuable, one-of-a-kind asset that fosters community and creates identity.





Figure 1.3: Imagination Playground

play space was funded, in part, by economic development money, and therefore, its success won't be measured by the excitement of children, but "if we hear squeals of laughter from business owners and condo developers who suddenly have a unique, kid-packed amenity to help them sell" (Smith). Had Rockwell placed your stereotypical playground components within the same space, I would imagine that its capacity to economically stimulate the surrounding area would not be felt.

The reviewed literature and case studies demonstrate the vital role parks play in contributing to local economic systems. Because the designer developed New Bremen's green space into an aesthetically pleasing and programmatically desirable play space, its effects reach far beyond the park's limits. Not only are community members able to share in its direct savings, but surrounding businesses also profit from park visitors. Furthermore, an increase in property value pleases owners and allows the city to gain more money from its taxation. At a time when individuals are still hesitant about the security of our greater economy, the design of a play park is exactly what our community needs to stimulate cash flow.

# 1.2 SURVEY SUMMARY

## QUESTIONNAIRE

1.

What is your favorite place? Why?

2.

How often do you go to a park or playground?

3.

How do you get there?

4.

Draw a playground!

5.

What do you like most about playgrounds?

6.

What do you like least about playgrounds?

7.

What would your dream play space be like? Draw it!

8.

How much do you know about New Bremen's history?

Nothing

A Little

A Lot

Figure 1.4: Survey Questions

What do you like least about playgrounds?

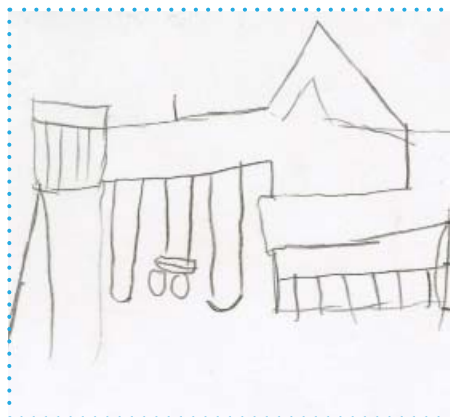
Id like the

match because i like taking of my

shoes and it hurts.

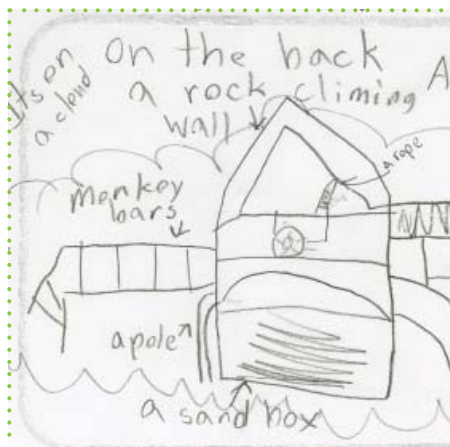
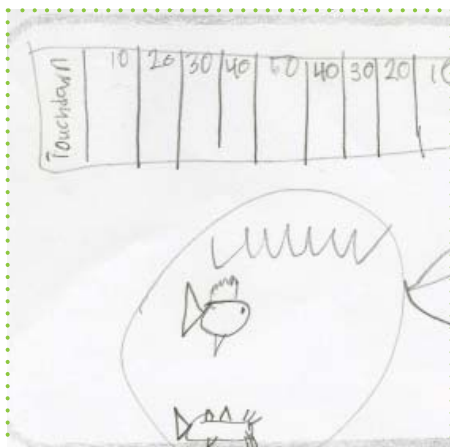
Figure 1.5: Survey Written Response Example

The depicted survey [Figure 1.4] was completed by approximately seventy New Bremen Elementary School fourth grade students via teachers Darlene Gilberg, Jodi Lange and Becky Keller. Comparing the results to those of past surveys, this study provided the designer with an understanding of how children's view of playgrounds has changed over the last few decades. It was used to specifically evaluate how New Bremen's children view their playgrounds today. The results influenced design, as desirable and not-so-desirable issues were brought to light. Question number seven was critical to inspiring the final design, as children's dream play spaces could ultimately be made into a reality.



Draw a Playground

Figure 1.6: Survey Playground Drawings



Draw your dream playspace

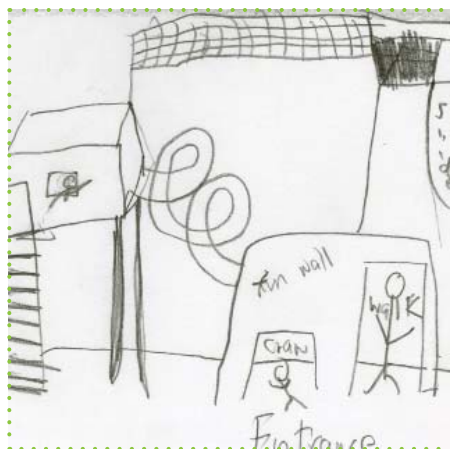


Figure 1.7: Survey Dream Playspace Drawings





- 2.1 Problem Statement
- 2.2 Subproblems
- 2.3 Hypothesis
- 2.4 Definitions
- 2.5 Delimitations
- 2.6 Assumptions

## 2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study proposes to design a park in New Bremen, Ohio that focuses on redefining the stereotypical playground. The benefits of natural play areas will be examined as well as the economic impact of parks on nearby businesses. The psychology of play will be investigated, and options for incorporating the site's history will also be explored.

## 2.2 SUBPROBLEMS

- 01** Investigate case studies that have redefined the stereotypical playground.  
(i.e. adventure playgrounds, natural playgrounds)
- 02** Explore the benefits natural play areas have over equipment-based designs.
- 03** Investigate the psychology of play and its importance in children's lives.
- 04** Determine the economic impact parks have on nearby businesses through the study of precedents.
- 05** Discover the history of the given site in New Bremen, Ohio and how that past can be used to inspire design.

## 2.3 HYPOTHESIS

Measurable benefits for New Bremen's children, communities, and businesses will result from the spirited implementation of a new playspace.

Today's traditional playground design represents a missed opportunity, lacking advantageous elements found in other park atmospheres such as the adventure and natural playground.

## 2.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

CHILDREN refers to the group of young people whom are in the developmental stages of life and use play as a means for encouraging cognitive development, acquiring motor skills, and learning about their immediate world.

PLAYGROUND refers to the unimaginative grouping of outdoor recreational equipment (i.e. slides, swings, seesaws) atop a flat surface to encourage play.

PLAYSPACE refers to the innovative incorporation of outdoor recreational equipment with the natural environment to create open-ended and unique areas for play.

RISK refers to a potentially hazardous challenge found in the play environment which the child is aware of and yet still chooses to interact with.

## 2.5 DELIMITATIONS

This project will not include sources of funding.

This project will not include a complete set of construction details.

This project will not include a maintenance schedule for playground upkeep after completion.

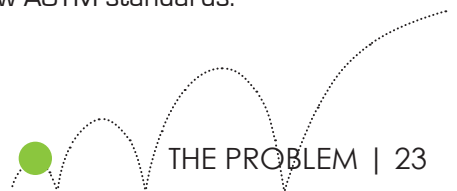
## 2.6 ASSUMPTIONS

Land defined by project limit line is developable for use as a public park.

Buildings and uses surrounding project site will remain the same.

Buildings and structures on site will remain.

All proposed playground equipment will follow ASTM standards.









- 3.1 Significance
- 3.2 Goals
- 3.3 Considerations & Concerns
- 3.4 Clients
- 3.5 Program

## 3.1 PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE



Figure 3.1: Playground of Anywhere, America

Too often we view playgrounds as manufactured slides, see-saws, and similar products set over a bed of mulch and surrounded by a sea of asphalt. But these seemingly mass-produced playgrounds contradict the very essence of the word. To play is to be imaginative – to invent your own, unique world. How can a child realistically dream of new places if we set the example that all of ours are the same? Significantly changing the way we approach playground design will allow for better spaces that enhance creativity and spark imagination in children of all ages.

When specifically speaking of New Bremen, Ohio, this project's significance becomes even more apparent. The proposed park will transform a currently underused space into a valuable asset for the village as a whole. Children will be offered a unique and safe playspace in which to dream, develop and learn, businesses will celebrate the increase in commerce, and all will enjoy the aesthetically pleasing green space now resting in the town's core. Additionally, the community's identity will be celebrated as residents and visitors alike explore New Bremen's history through play. By incorporating elements of New Bremen's past, the playspace will forever embody the innate qualities which shaped the city's evolution. And as children learn about a world past, they are able to better understand, and playfully interact, with their world of today.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## *A BIG, WARM & HEART-FELT THANKS TO:*

**MY FAMILY.** For their continuous support, undying belief in my dreams, and valiant effort at understanding exactly what being a Landscape Architect means.

**MY CLASSMATES.** For inspiring me to be the designer I am today, making the past five years more than memorable, and becoming the best group of friends I could ever desire.

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**MARTHA HUNT, CHRIS MARLOW, JOHN MOTLOCH, & BUCRU YIGIT TURAN.** For specifically aiding this project's development, supporting my passion for playspace design, and making it possible for me to produce a comprehensive project that I am undoubtedly proud of.

## 3.2 PROJECT GOALS

### 01 Merge spaces for spectators with spaces for play.

- Encourage adults to observe from the center of the play area instead of the outside, in order to promote more interaction.
- Design shared space elements to be used for play and seating in order to allow active use during all hours of the day.

### 02 Integrate natural, adventure, and traditional play.

- Utilize existing vegetated areas for natural play; maintain earth tones.
- Locate adventure play where there is the highest contrast in topography; introduce new materials and forms.
- Locate traditional play on level or low grade ground plane; integrate brightly colored equipment to communicate strong color contrasts.
- Add elements from remaining two play types into the predominant play space in order to maintain unity across site.

### 03 Incorporate New Bremen's history and culture into the play space.

- Use plant material to communicate site character during given time period.
- Allow play elements to reflect historical period.
- Use the site as a timeline to walk user through New Bremen's past.

### 04 Primarily accommodate for today's popular play theory: play is used to test emotions.

- Provide open ended play elements that could play a role in many different worlds of pretend.
- Offer children stage-like settings to play out their imaginative stories.
- Ensure that through these elements, play activities continue to encourage physical and cognitive development.



## 3.3 PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS & CONCERNS



Figure 3.2: Canal Boat

### HISTORICAL ELEMENTS

With numerous elements embedded within New Bremen's past, the task of rationalizing which historical aspect should be used to guide design could prove to be a difficult, yet pivotal, decision. Another major design decision to consider was deciding whether to focus on one aspect of their history or to tell the story of New Bremen's complete past and those major influences that led the village to become the town we see today. Furthermore, should the playspace chronicle New Bremen's ever evolving past, ensuring that the site still works together a whole will then become the next challenge.

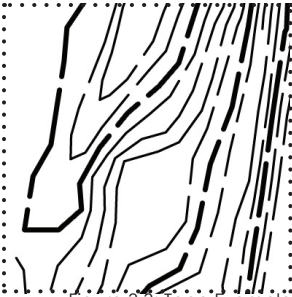


Figure 3.3: Topo Example

### TOPOGRAPHY

Much of the chosen site is composed of a sloping surface that goes from the canal, on the east portion, to a creek, on the west portion. Whether the playspace is adapted to fit within these existing conditions and able to still conform to playground standards will be a major question. The slope is not gentle enough to be universally acceptable, yet not steep enough to be utilized for sledding or sliding purposes. Should the topography be changed, drainage and stormwater will need to be addressed.



Figure 3.4: Residential Backyards

## SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

Because the site is located to the backs of both residential units and business entities, the idea of who feels as if they own the park will undoubtedly contribute to its success. It will be important to encourage everyone to have a sense of shared ownership to promote upkeep and encourage community.



Figure 3.5: Tow Path

## VISIBILITY, ACCESS & SAFETY

Similarly, because of the park's somewhat hidden locality, visibility, access and safety become a concern. An elevated tow path runs through the site, providing pedestrian access on the eastside, but west entries are virtually nonexistent. This tow path is active during daytime hours, providing for a safe green space atmosphere during the day. But how the park is treated at night should be considered, as illegal or risky behaviors should be discouraged.



Figure 3.6: Group Play

## DESIGNING FOR ALL

Though this project focuses on creating better play environments for today's children, it should not discourage play by those of other ages. Ensuring that the design caters to individuals of all developmental abilities should be a major aim of the project's outcome. Elements of universal accessibility should also be considered. Designing a playspace for everyone will only further contribute to its success.

## 3.4 CLIENTS



Figure 3.7: Child Sledding

### CHILDREN

The primary client was children. Their wants, needs, and desires were all taken into consideration to ensure the given park appropriately reflects them and seamlessly encourages healthy development. This client served as the prime catalyst that would bring livelihood and laughter to New Bremen's new playspace.



Figure 3.8: Residential Character

### RESIDENTS

The surrounding residential community was another important client, for the specified park space could be viewed as their backyard. Because select portions of the site are to be constructed through community-build teams, the sense of ownership over the area would be most strongly felt by this cliental.



Figure 3.9: Local Pharmacy

### BUSINESS OWNERS

Surrounding business owners also acted as a client. It was important that this group of individuals supported the proposed playspace design so they could be assured that its success would only increase theirs.



Figure 3.10: Village Seal

### VILLAGE OF NEW BREMEN

The paying client was the Village of New Bremen. It was therefore important to keep in mind that the proposed playspace should reflect the town's image as a whole and strengthen that identity. For this client, the new park would increase the city's commonwealth and create an aesthetically pleasing green space to rest in the village core.



Figure 3.11: Nature Play

## ENVIRONMENT

This project spoke for the environment as well. Nature was both conserved and enhanced as healthy vegetation was left in place and additional plant life was provided for. Keeping this client in mind, existing natural systems were also preserved.





- 4.1 Site Summary
- 4.2 Site History
- 4.3 Site Photos
- 4.4 Site Inventory
- 4.5 Site Analysis

## 4.1 SITE SUMMARY

The project site is located within New Bremen, Ohio (figure 4.1), a village of approximately 3,000 located in the west-central part of the state. Surrounding the town, the land is largely used for agricultural purposes, and this small town, farm-based character is common when looking at the site on a larger scale. The nearest city with a population greater than 50,000 is Springfield, Ohio located 46.5 miles away (City Data).

New Bremen was formed when individuals of primarily German decent traveled up the Miami-Erie Canal trading goods. The German ancestry is still prevalent in the area, as 66.9% of New Bremen residents, in 2009, were of German ancestry (City Data). Perhaps more significant however, is the fact that the canal still runs through the heart of the city, as well as through the selected project site. More can be read about the canal's impact on the area by referencing section x.x Site History. When speaking of the specific site's past, after its function as a place for canal related purposes came to an end, the land served as a junk yard until the town purchased it in the late 1960s. The green space has changed little since then.

The roughly six acre site is surrounded by residential to the west and, in a more detached way, to the east, with a large majority of these units being single family homes. The median household income in 2008 was \$59,031 (City Data). Commercial and institutional entities primarily surround the remainder of the site. Select localities include a drug store, barber shop, coffee shop, one-room movie theater, bicycle museum, and public library.

Certain amenities are also offered on site. The Pavilion and sledding hill, however, are possibly the only ones viewed as active. Other, less used, elements on site include a basketball court, horseshoe pits, playground, and ample amounts of open lawn. Figures x.x through x.x help visualize the site's amenities and overall character.



Ohio

New Bremen



## 4.2 SITE HISTORY

Established in the year 1833, the village of New Bremen has now had nearly two hundred years of ever changing life take place within its limits (Bernstein 5). Its past is undoubtedly rich with culturally important details and events that have helped shape the community into what it is today. By exploring the historical material made available by the Village of New Bremen, the Historic Society, Mark Bernstein and the memories of lifelong citizens, we are able to



Figure 4.2: Historic Photo of Lock Keeper's House

get a glimpse at this captivating past. Stories of New Bremen's long gone ways can then be used to inspire design and allow its citizens to not only understand the past, but also feel connected to its rich history. Exploring such sources of inspiration is thus the first step in making the proposed park a monumental success.

Running along the east side of the site is the Miami-Erie canal. It is easy to recognize that this hand dug waterway is a large part of why New Bremen exists. Settlers from the German states traveled up its waters from Cincinnati trading goods (Historic Assoc.). After the canal's official opening in 1845, hotels and other businesses began appearing and a town was

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

I was motivated to change how spaces for play are designed after an internship experience in which educational design was of prime responsibility. I found it ironic that more creativity was oftentimes put into things like parking lot circulation and parent drop-offs than into the spaces where school kids could continue to gain an education through outdoor play. After contemplating this concept more and observing the world around me it was evident that playspaces around the world were all approached in this same programmed manner. They all seemed to be created by individuals who know something about design, but nothing about play, or vice versa. This project is therefore significant because it bridges that gap. By having both a design and play knowledge set, I was able to prove that upgrading our idea of the stereotypical playground provides for numerous benefits that extend far beyond a child's world of fun.

This comprehensive undergraduate project not only allowed me to explore a specific interest area within the profession of landscape architecture, but it also served to push the field, as a whole, further. As I learned more about the intricacies of park, open space, and playground design, I was also able to problem solve and develop improved objectives to reach for when designing such spaces. I hope you enjoy the following pages which effectively represent my work on the subject and exemplify such concepts firsthand. New Bremen's new "playborhood" design proves that a playground's opportunities are endless.

soon established at its banks (Historic Assoc.) The Miami-Erie Canal was crucial to the village's formation, still runs through the heart of the city, and lies on the edge of the project site, therefore creating a major opportunity to incorporate some breadth of its story into the new playspace design. The old cow path, however, which has since been transformed into a pedestrian and bike way, also runs alongside the canal and already tells of its evolution over time. If the Miami-Erie canal were to be the theme of the new playspace, individuals should learn and be engaged in its history in a new way.

Representing the history of the specific site is important in understanding place. Within the project's limits once sat two different buildings, one was the lock tender's house and the other the livery (Evening Leader). The village recently built a replica of the Lock Keeper's House for use by organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, but there is nothing on site that represents the past livery. If the new playspace should take on attributes of the old stable, it would adequately compliment what is already built. But throughout history, the site has also been used as farming grounds and a junk yard. Could these elements be incorporated as well? Mayor Jeff Pape talks of the site's time spent as a dump by describing a scene of old cars and Meadow Gold milk delivery trucks. This use lasted until it switched ownership in the early 1960s and became part of the Village of New Bremen's property (email). Overall, its evolution as a place brings about several sources of inspiration for playful learning experiences. A seamless journey could be represented, taking kids of all ages through the specific site's past and towards its future.

Or perhaps one should look beyond the site's boundaries for historical inspiration. The playspace could be stimulated by other aspects of New Bremen's past. Pumpkin growing is becoming ever more popular, as the village will soon hold the Guinness World record for largest pumpkin pie. The Bicycle Museum of America sits in close proximity to the site. The park would be a good way to represent the evolution of bikes throughout

the years and their direct role in the surrounding community. Another possibility is to emphasize New Bremen's German heritage, currently only found embedded in building styles and community attitudes. The common heritage has gave way to a collective group of people that are stubborn, hard-working, and most importantly, under the "cultural injunction that one be usefully engaged in something" (Bernstein 43). With the multitude of these various overarching topics, I have taken that this community need play a role in choosing what piece of history to focus on. The interactive park will



Figure 4.3: World's Largest Pumpkin Pie

not only inform future generations of New Bremen's past, but will also serve as an icon for New Bremen's future, and it is therefore important that the citizens play a role in shaping it.

Compiling the whole of New Bremen's past is also feasible. What if the proposed playspace shaped into a story that did not simply focus on one aspect, but told of all New Bremen's significant features and events? MSI Design's Discovery Frontier Playground, in fact, did just that with the city of Grove Park, Ohio. A 634 foot engraved timeline lies embedded in the walkway and outlines specific events in Grove City's past (Stretch). Its success proves that a focus on the larger picture, rather than a single time period, can work. A critique for this project, however, is that the due to its multiple



themes, children are not as engaged as they could be in the historical piece of the design. The timeline is more so to occupy the adults, whom bring children to play. If it were more engaging, both age groups would be able to benefit. New Bremen's playspace should playfully incorporate its past so that all, children, adults, residents, and visitors alike, are able to absorb and appreciate its unique story.

"New Bremen is changing...it is new, or old, depending on where one looks" (Berstein 94). The proposed park will embody both aspects, as it will be a new playspace celebrating an old, but cherished, world. Research demonstrates that this little town has an immense past. Its evolution as a place, as well as a community, makes it distinctive. Emphasizing those unique qualities will be imperative for further inspiring community and a sense of ownership among its residents. With the town's solid background of development, and proud citizens who are willing to share that past, it is only fitting that the playspace physically tell New Bremen's story. By interactively sharing New Bremen's history with children of today, and those to come, the past will never be lost. Children will grow up with the same stubborn pride for their hometown that was characteristic of generations long gone because they know, and have played in, its past.



Figure 4.4: New Bremen Historic Downtown



Figure 4.5: Bicycle Museum of America

4.3 SITE PHOTOS

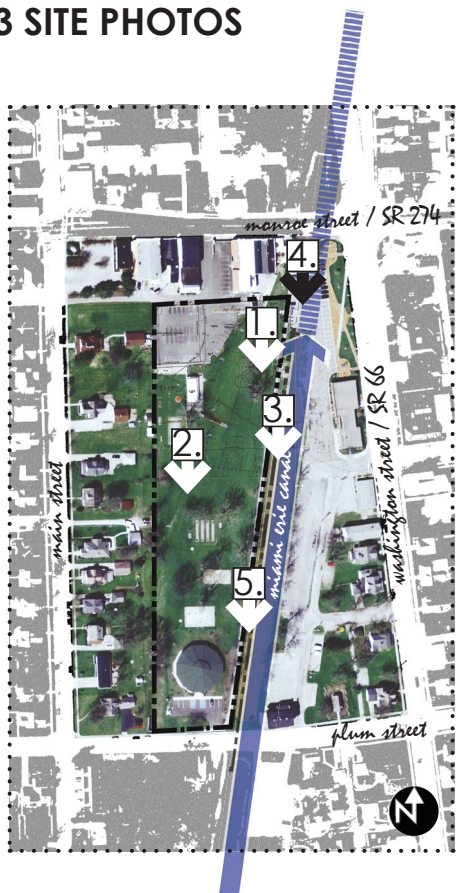


Figure 4.6: Lock Keeper's House



Figure 4.8: 1864 Bowstring Bridge



Figure 4.9: Lock One, Looking South





Figure 4.7: Creek & Pavillion, Looking South



Figure 4.10: Canal & Tow Path, Looking North

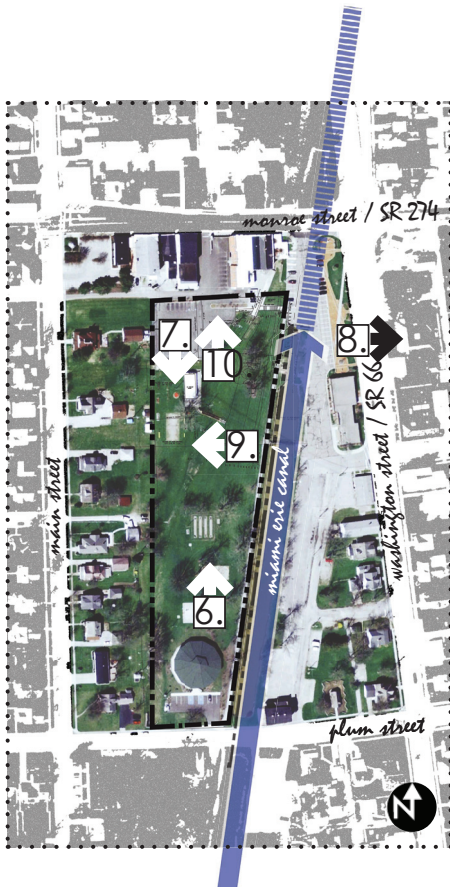


Figure 4.11: Mud Volleyball Court

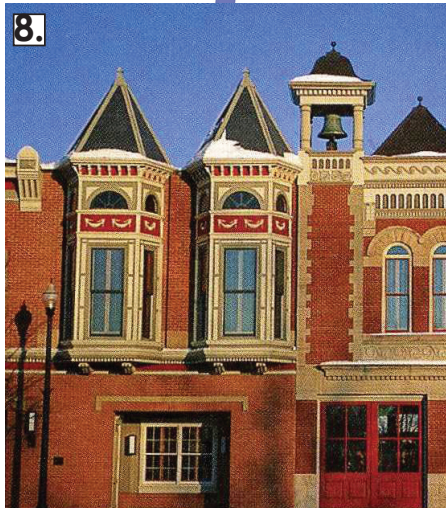


Figure 4.13: Surrounding Commercial

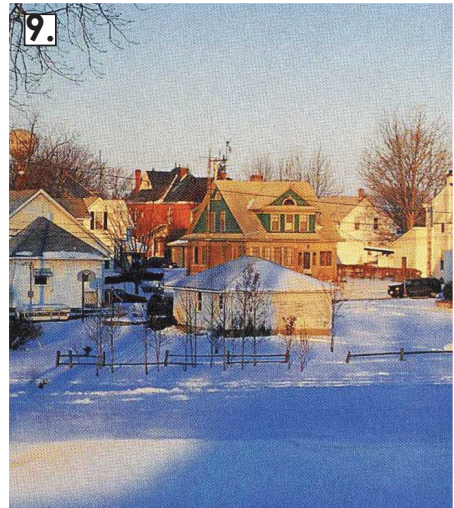


Figure 4.14: Surrounding Residential



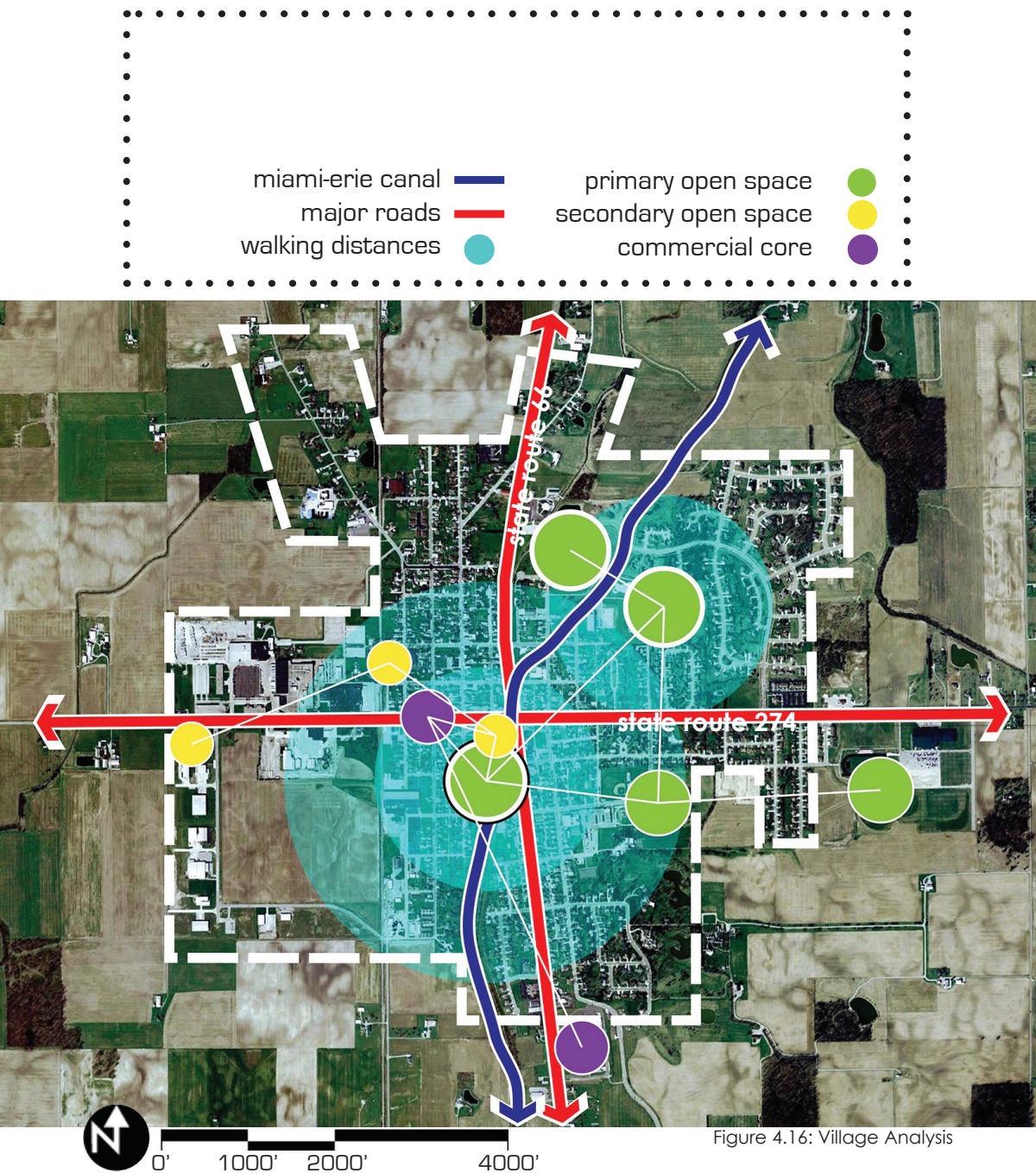


Figure 4.12: Playground, Looking South



Figure 4.15: Parking Lot and Commercial Backs, Looking North

# 4.4 REGIONAL INVENTORY & ANALYSIS



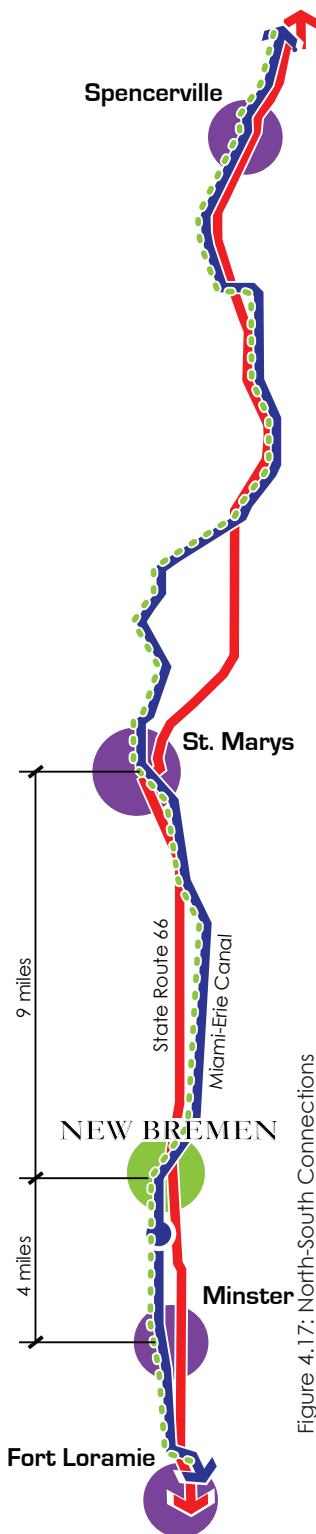


Figure 4.17: North-South Connections

## VILLAGE ANALYSIS

As one can see from the diagrammatical map of New Bremen, the site (indicated by the green circle outlined in black) is located at the heart of the village [figure 4.15]. A ten minute walking distance from its center covers a approximately 65% of the town. Creating a park system connecting all primary open spaces, including localities like Bremenfest Park, a nature conservancy, and High School sports parks, would allow the site to be highly accessible by the entirety of this town. Purple circles exemplify the competing pull between New Bremen's well-kept downtown and those in the outlying strip mall. Yellow circles indicate the secondary open spaces such as a small public pond and a church picnic and play space. There exists a strong opportunity to combine all elements into a workable system through the enhancement of this core village green space.

## NORTH-SOUTH CONNECTIONS

A strong north-south connection exists for promoting both vehicular and pedestrian movement to and from the site [figure 4.16]. State route 66, along with the Miami-Erie canal and adjacent tow path, successfully join the string of small towns along this vertical axis. But while there is ample opportunity for easy access to the site, it is important that there is also a strong draw factor to ensure such travel occurs. This draw factor must act as a destination for both kids and adults alike. Though children will be the primary clients of the park, adults will be the ones who ultimately choose to bring this user group to the park.



# 4.5 SITE INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

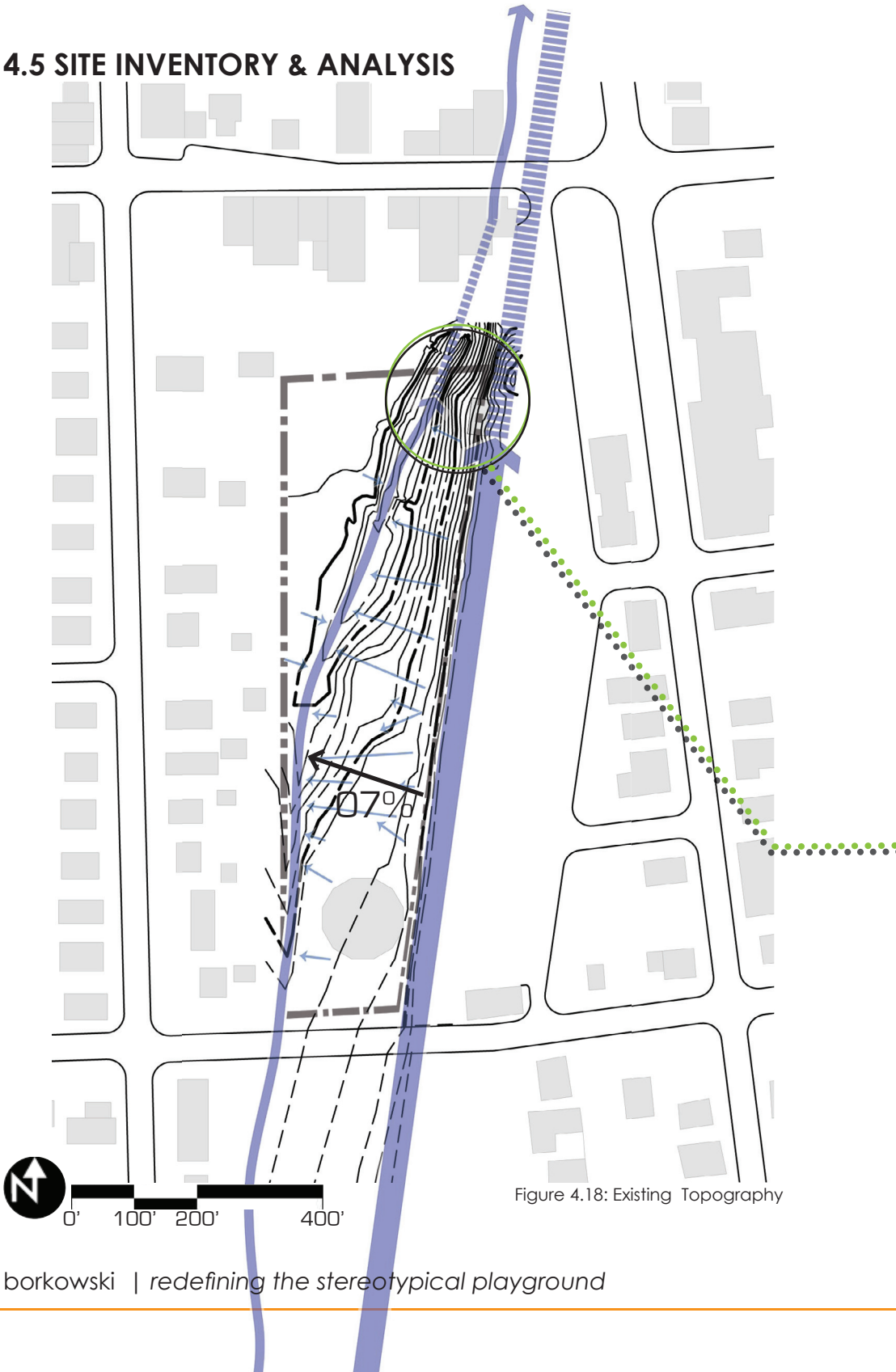


Figure 4.18: Existing Topography



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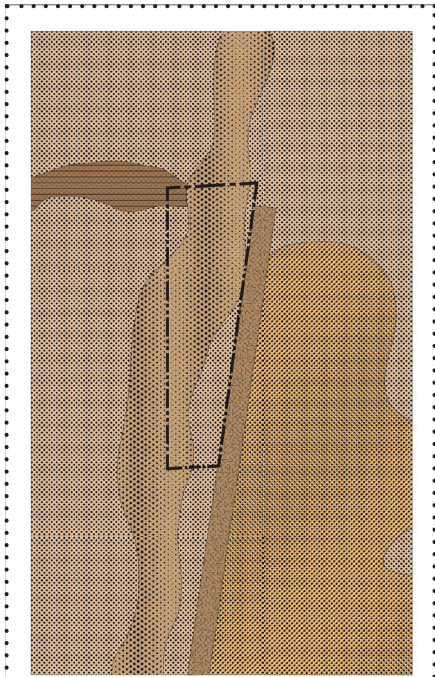
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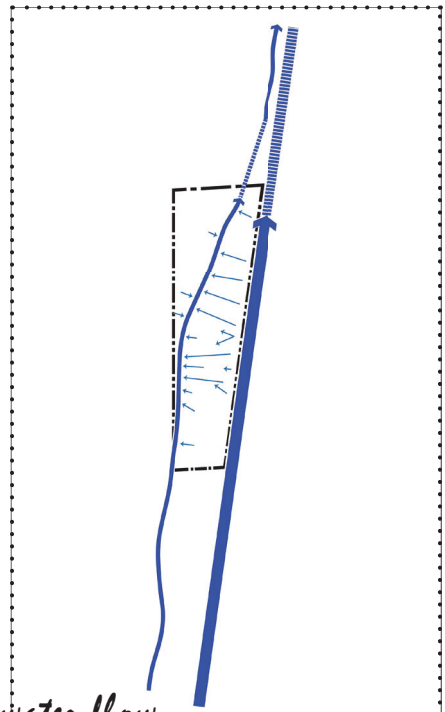
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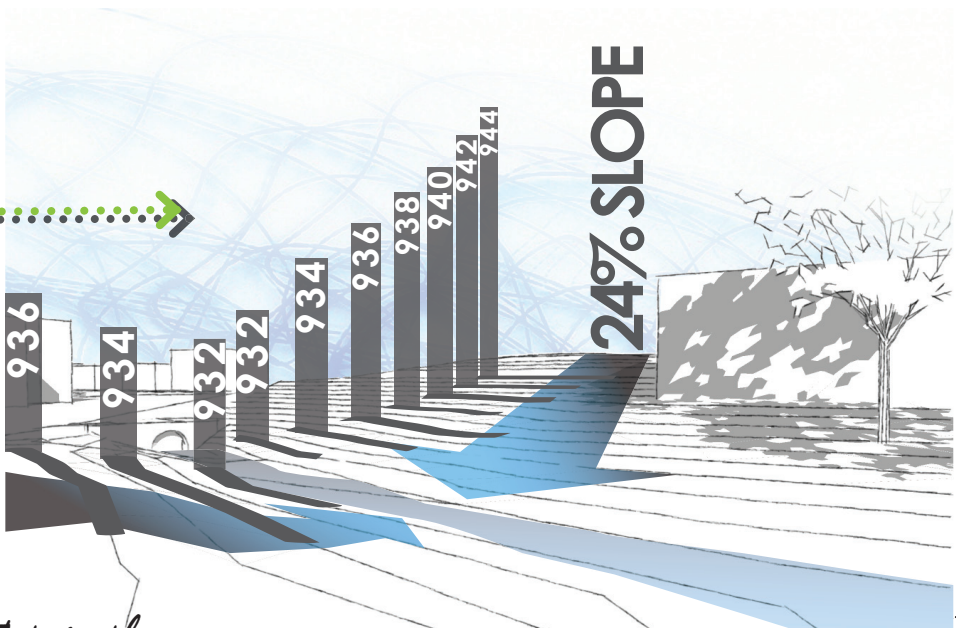
*soils*

Figure 4.19: Soils



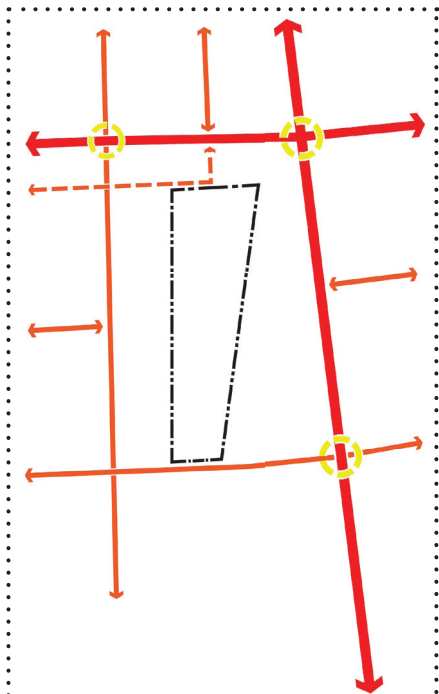
*water flow*

Figure 4.20: Water Flow

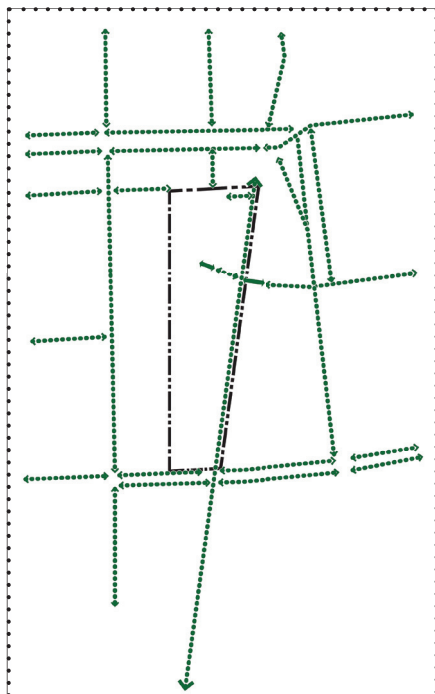


*topography*

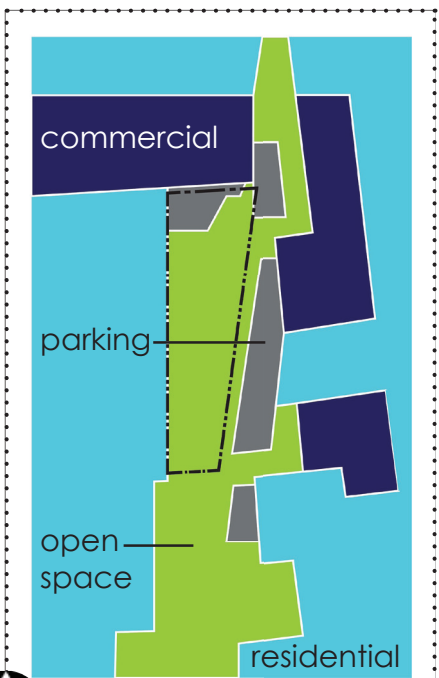
Figure 4.21: Topography Visualization



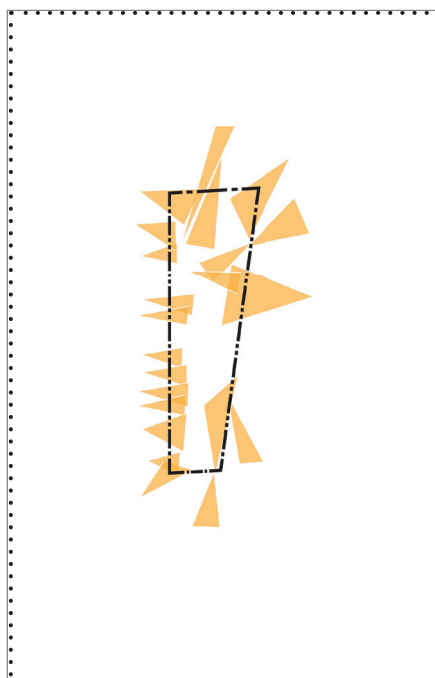
*vehicular circ.* Figure 4.22: Vehicular Circ.



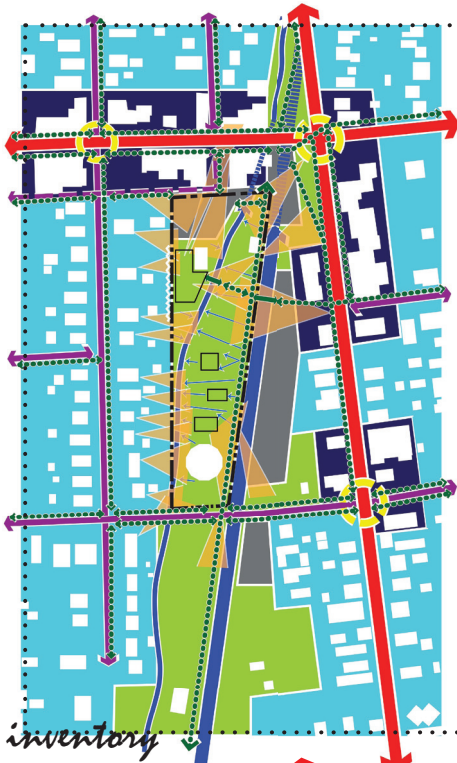
*pedestrian circ.* Figure 4.23: Pedestrian Circ.



*zoning* Figure 4.24: Zoning



*viewsheds* Figure 4.25: Viewsheds



## INVENTORY

The diagram at left combines all individually investigated inventory layers [figures 4.18-4.19, 4.21-4.24] into one comprehensive drawing. The simplification of each system allows the success or struggling challenge of each to be brought to light. By observing at large where all these pieces overlap, the designer is better able to make analytical statements that exemplify where certain programs or design elements should take place.

Figure 4.26: Inventory



## ANALYSIS

This diagram is the response to the site's voice, as heard in figure 4.25. Orange circles represent major activity nodes, while green arrows show of opportunity to connect these two areas by strengthening the tow path and green space, that currently flows through each. The need for established entry points are called out (yellow), a central node is placed to utilize viewsheds and topography (red), and the need for residential connections are indicated (grey).

Figure 4.27: Analysis





## 5.1 Takano Hillside Park

## 5.2 Saint Louis City Museum

## 5.3 Belleville Park Playground

## 5.4 Conclusion

Select playspaces scattered around the globe have gone above and beyond the stereotypical image of a playground to provide children with unique and imaginative worlds. By studying these places, one is made aware of the limitless possibilities underutilized in a majority of our current spaces designed for play. Takano Hillside Park, the St. Louis City Museum, and Belleville Park Playground however are four examples of how creativity in playground design can be achieved.

## 5.1 TAKANO HILLSIDE PARK

The Children's Playground at Takano Hillside Park is located in Sapporo-shi, Hokkaido, Japan and was done by Fumiaki Takano in March of 2000 [Architecture-Page]. Its 400 ha were inspired by forms found in nature and are used to create a multisensory experience for young visitors [Architecture-Page]. Play elements include a rainbow nest dome, ant hive tunnel, forest corridor and mid-air birds nest. Each of these play structures or environments included in the overall park design demonstrate that the designer truly understood today's children and how they play. "Keeping in mind the limited experience of children in contemporary society when faced with wild environs, the design attempts to adjust them to play in the forest gradually along a five stage program" [Architecture-Page]. The knowledge of the park's users is evident in every detail of the design, and as this idea communicates directly to park users, it contributes directly to its overall success.



Figure 5.1: Takano Hillside Park Slides



Figure 5.2: Takano Hillside Park Rainbow Nest

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## INTRODUCTION

I must laugh and dance and sing  
Youth is such a lovely thing  
Soon I shall be too old, stately  
I shall promenade sedately  
Down a narrow pavement street  
And the people that I meet  
Will be still and narrow too  
Careful what they say and do  
It will be quite plain to see  
They were never young like me  
When I walk where flowers grow  
I shall have to stoop down low  
If I want one for a prize  
Now I'm just the proper size  
Let me laugh and dance and sing  
Youth is such a lovely thing

Child, age 13  
(Wilkinson 32-33)

As this child discovers the beauty in being young, the greater population struggles at recognizing its irreplaceable splendor. Children develop this perspective of a grown-up world in which dullness reigns and play and creativity cease to exist. Perhaps if designers were to develop spaces for play that went beyond the worn out playground of Anywhere, America, children would be more apt to view their future world in the same manner they do today. Bringing creativity back to the playground would demonstrate that adults too recognize the beauty of being a kid. And as we create more innovative spaces in which children can laugh, dance, sing, and celebrate being a child, we inadvertently will create more dynamic places that create identity and foster community.



